

Virginia Board of Education  
Student Advisory Committee  
Minutes: April 25, 2006

Students in Attendance:

Victoria Artis, Daniel Morgan Middle School; Cristina Azimi, James W. Robinson, Jr. Secondary School; Michael Burt, Hidden Valley High School; Taikein Cooper, Prince Edward County High School; Vincent Feucht, West Point High School; Carlie Fogleman, Lebanon High School; Stacey LaRiviere, Bailey Bridge Middle School; Adrian Lehn, George Washington, Middle School; Dion Quick, Hugo Owens Middle School; Franklin Tennyson, Hermitage High School; and Alexandra Whitehead, Staunton River High School.

Virginia Board of Education Members in Attendance:

Isis Castro, Eleanor Saslaw, Mark Emblidge

Department of Education Staff in Attendance:

Anne Westcott, Michelle Parker, Melissa Velazquez

Mrs. Castro and Mrs. Saslaw welcomed the members of the Student Advisory Committee and reviewed the day's activities.

The Student Advisory Committee convened in their three work groups to discuss the research they had done since the last meeting and to develop their reports and recommendations for presentation to the Board of Education at its meeting on Wednesday, April 26, 2006.

The members of Work Group One developed their position and recommendations regarding Promotion of a Statewide Peer Conflict Mediation Program. The members of Work Group Two developed their position and recommendations regarding Creating a Comprehensive Approach in Virginia Public Schools for a Student's Awareness of the Real World. The members of Work Group Three developed their position and recommendations regarding Promoting Academic and Extracurricular Well-Roundedness in all Virginia Public Schools.

The entire Student Advisory Committee then convened to hear the presentations from the three work groups and to make any suggestions for changes to the final reports. The reports for presentation to the Board of Education at its April 26, 2006 meeting are attached. The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

**Statement from the 2005-2006 Student Advisory Committee  
of the  
Virginia Board of Education**

**Issue of Discussion:**

Promotion of a Statewide Peer Conflict Mediation Program

**Background:**

Statistics have proven that Peer Mediation Programs provide students with a comfortable and confidential environment in which they can arrive at solutions to their personal conflicts. Peer Mediation Programs teach lifetime skills such as problem solving and leadership, while also demonstrating the magnitude of social interactions. According to *Pathways to Peace*, a guideline provided at the Annual Northern Virginia Regional Student Mediation Conference, “[m]ediation is a voluntary process facilitated by a third party who helps students work through conflict. Mediators do not take sides; they help students come up with their own solutions.” One out of every eight teenagers suffers from depression and even more feel the adverse effects of outside pressure. It has been proven that Peer Conflict Mediation Programs lower the occurrences of school violence by offering “trapped” teens a sense of security in their peers. Working with a student mediator reduces tensions between conflicting parties by addressing the issue in a non-threatening manner.

**Position of the Student Advisory Committee:**

The Student Advisory Committee feels that peer intervention is important to the expansion of dynamic citizens into society. Peer Conflict Mediation has the power to stop dilemmas before they escalate into life altering decisions. The 2005-2006 Student Advisory Committee believes that peer mediation is vital to reducing the undesirable effects of peer pressure. We feel that a statewide program in the area of Peer Conflict Mediation would advance the school atmosphere and improve the quality of life for each individual inside the Commonwealth.

**Formal Recommendation of the Student Advisory Committee:**

The Student Advisory Committee recommends that the Virginia Board of Education:

- Institute a statewide Peer Conflict Mediation Program for grades 4-12
- Appoint program coordinators (such as school guidance counselors)
- Provide a peer mediation screening process to be used by each Virginia public school
  - The screening process will entail the following:
    - Peer mediators will be required to have and maintain a “B” average or higher
    - Teacher recommendations
    - Personal interview
    - Signing of confidentiality form
- Have schools provide incentives to become a peer mediator

- Arrange a statewide seminar for future peer mediators and program coordinators
- Allow separate guidelines to be utilized in individual schools

Submitted by:

Victoria Artis – Alexandra Whitehead  
Christina Azimi – Fairfax County Public Schools  
Michael Burt – Roanoke County Public Schools  
Taikein Cooper – Prince Edward County Schools  
Jennifer Deskins – York County Public Schools  
Vincent Feucht – West Point High School  
Carlie Fogleman – Russell County Public Schools  
Stacy LaRiviere – Chesterfield County Public Schools  
Adrian Lehnen – Alexandria Public Schools  
Dion Quick – Chesapeake Public Schools  
Franklin Tennyson, III – Henrico County Public Schools  
Alexandra Whitehead – Bedford County Public Schools

**Statement from the 2005-2006 Student Advisory Committee  
of the  
Virginia Board of Education**

**Issue of Discussion:**

Creating a comprehensive approach in Virginia Public Schools for a student's awareness of the real world

**Background:**

An understanding of economics and career opportunities will help students become successful, functioning members of society. Currently, there are limited opportunities available prior to graduation to help students learn about and experience various career options. Furthermore, fiscal responsibility and financial literacy is lacking in the secondary school curriculum, leaving many graduates inadequately prepared for the real world. These skills and experiences are crucial to student success after graduation. The General Assembly has taken a significant first step with Senate Bill 950 to ensure that students are fiscally prepared for life.

**Position and Rationale of the Student Advisory Committee:**

The General Assembly has addressed the problem of lacking financial literacy among the students of Virginia. The Student Advisory Committee feels that an aggressive approach should be taken to implement the points introduced in Senate Bill 950. Not only is economics education important to the success of students, but a keen awareness of career paths and job opportunities is also fundamental. We support the initial step taken by the General Assembly; however, we feel that the lack of awareness concerning career and technical opportunities should be addressed in conjunction with the economic education curriculum.

**Formal Recommendation of the Student Advisory Committee:**

We feel these recommendations will help the Virginia Board of Education better prepare students for post-secondary school life. These recommendations are by no means all-inclusive, but rather a basis for infusing financial literacy into the current curriculum and introducing students to specific career paths.

We have the following recommendations:

- The approval of the financial literacy curriculum
- The addition of career awareness into the proposed financial literacy curriculum
- Establish guidelines that would enable every student to have access to in-depth career and technical field experience including but not limited to job shadowing, career fairs, internships, etc.
- Encourage public schools to transition this material into a half-credit semester class designed to teach financial literacy and career awareness

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**Statement from the 2005-2006 Student Advisory Committee  
of the  
Virginia Board of Education**

**Issue of Discussion:**

Promoting academic and extracurricular well-roundedness in all Virginia public schools

**Background:**

Standardized testing and other state educational mandates place restraints on students. These restraints may prohibit some students from taking full advantage of all academic opportunities as they pertain to the student's interests (i.e. foreign language, math, science, etc.). Having to meet state requirements and neglect their fields of interest, students are often at a stressful disadvantage. Therefore, students sacrifice citizenship (participation and involvement in the community through extracurricular activities) and preferences (taking classes particular to the student's possible interests) for academic achievement. It is the belief of the committee that such concentration is unhealthy and does not benefit the student when considering their future.

**Position of the Student Advisory Committee:**

The Student Advisory Committee feels that measures must be taken to address this critical issue. The committee believes that academic competition and not going beyond standardized testing requirements in Virginia classrooms puts students at a disadvantage when applying for colleges and scholarships. The committee hopes that the Board of Education may broaden the focus of students beyond standardized testing into the school and community environment. This will promote students to become involved in their communities and to realize their civic responsibilities. This will eliminate civic apathy and will put students in touch with the realities of a dynamic society. The committee understands the importance of academic achievement but realizes the need to diversify public school education in Virginia as it pertains to the interests of students. The committee believes all Virginia students should have the opportunity to engage in extracurricular activities from sports and clubs to community services to civic involvement. Furthermore, the Virginia Board of Education should reward students who display these qualities while achieving academic success. We believe that maintaining a high level of involvement as well as intellectual endeavors embodies the spirit of the Commonwealth of Virginia as exemplified by historical and contemporary leaders. It is the belief of the committee that many Virginia students are deprived of academic equality as the result of their area's economic status. Under the bylaws of the Virginia Board of Education it states, "*[The Board] believes all students in Virginia deserve a quality education based on the same standards regardless of where they live or their economic status...Within constitutional parameters, has supported and facilitated various initiatives to develop a public education system that will produce graduates equipped to compete in a global economy and to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens.*" In light of this, the Board of Education must take comprehensive action to fulfill the intention of the bylaws. It is our hope that the following suggestions will contribute to academic reformation and the promotion of well-rounded students in Virginia public schools.

**Recommendations:**

To put our position into action, we recommend that the State Board of Education:

- Promote the Virginia Virtual AP School and the Senior Year Plus Program to all Virginia public schools so that more students become aware of this opportunity and take advantage of its benefits.
- Investigate expanding this program to include a wider range of courses that would serve the individual interests of students, including but not limited to foreign languages, fine arts, advanced math and science, humanities, and writing intensive courses.
- Explore the allocation of funds and research grants that will enable schools to expand their Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment programs, especially in low income areas where these opportunities otherwise would not be offered.
- Create a recognition program to be known as the “Spirit of the Commonwealth Award” that will recognize:
  - Student leadership in the school and community
  - Student involvement in clubs, sports, societies, and service organizations
  - Academic achievement
  - Civic involvement
- Suggest that local school boards create a “Spirit of the Commonwealth” seal for high school diplomas for students that meet the criteria
- Award qualified students with a certificate signed by the President of the Board of Education acknowledging achievement in the program.

It is the hope of the committee that the Board of Education will expand this program to create additional rewards for exemplary students as the program grows. Our goal is to promote both academic stimulation as well as extracurricular involvement to give Virginia students a competitive edge for both short-term success in the college application process and long-term success in preparing students for civic responsibility.

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